

Reflections: Multiples, and Sibling Relationships in Literature

**An Honors Thesis (ENG 444)**

**by**

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## Abstract

Sibling relationships are a unique aspect of family dynamics. Siblings are the earliest influence in a child's life and often affect them even into adulthood. While each relationship varies, the portrayal of sibling relationships, especially multiples, in literature is hardly ever contrary from one story to the next. The themes of similarity between twins is something that has been occurring for centuries, starting with Shakespeare and continuing to film, such as in *The Parent Trap*. As a multiple myself, I was curious to study how my relationship with my siblings growing up differs from those of others and the time periods they grew up in. The research I completed in my English Capstone class about Middletown has created the following story: *Headlights*. June Schaefer is on the cusp of adulthood; but how does that change when her twin brother is found murdered? This story is about the struggles of being a multiple, being a sibling, and entering into adulthood and the opportunities and constraints that hold us back.

## Acknowledgements

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I want to thank my family. To Heath and Josh, for giving me experience in this field over the years. Lastly, I want to thank my parents for always encouraging me to follow my passions. Without your support, I would have not accomplished a lot of things, including this story. Thanks for raising me to strive for excellence and to always finish what I start.

## **Author's Statement**

When I started out on this journey, I had no idea what I would uncover about my subject or myself as a writer. I wanted to write a compelling story about twins in a fictional Midwestern town. The inspiration for my original story concept was simple: one twin kills the other, falsely accusing a couple of African American boys for the murder, much like the incident that occurred in Marion on August 7, 1930. With my own experience as a multiple, I didn't foresee much difficulty. However, without research, the story I created felt flat and could not convey the story that I desperately wanted to tell. Without knowing more about the time period, the relationships between certain groups of people, and specific procedures of the town during that time period, I could not accomplish my goal. I wanted to portray the competitiveness that I experienced when growing up, but in an extreme way. This inspiration was a driving force, but it needed a little oomph! However, in the books I've read about multiples (mostly twins), I found the usual plot line of being mistaken for the other, trying to break the molds of similarity, and feeling as if they do not have a voice outside of their grouped mentality. Therefore, my research first followed twinship, then cultural aspects of the 1930s, and lastly Muncie in the 30s.

## **Twinship**

I first wanted to research a subject that I was familiar with, but there was still unknown aspects out there, waiting to be discovered. Competing with two brothers all my life was well-known territory, but that still didn't make me an expert. To understand what it was like to compete with a sibling, especially a twin, I asked one of my coworkers for her experience as a multiple. She directed me to her memoir piece entitled "The Twin". She establishes the frustration of always being compared, and the way Society sees twins beautifully:

Everyone knows twins come in sets. A set of twins is a unit, a pair that, when one is mentioned, the second is often close behind. A couple standing in for an individual. The “Insert Surname Here” Twins. Why bother with individual names when there’s a valid, socially recognized label for the set? (Berg, “The Twin”).

The rawness that Berg displays is comforting, but it also shows a deep wound on exhibit. It’s a reality check to hear about the constant comparison that comes from teachers, colleagues, and even family members:

...if you read almost any text that discusses identity in philosophy, psychology, or the humanities in general, you’d know that part of knowing who we are is knowing who we’re *not*. And when you learn to respond to the name Diane just as readily as you respond to the name Jessica...when you’re *one part of a set*, it becomes awfully hard to say, “I know who I am because I’m different from everyone else.” Because you’re not different from everyone else. Not *everyone else*. There’s someone who’s just like you, and they threaten to gobble you up, even though they’d probably like just as much as you would to be their own person. (Berg, “The Twin”).

Even though my characters are different genders, the competitiveness that drives them towards the same goal, the feelings of being “gobbled up” remains through the strengths and weaknesses of the other. These strengths and weaknesses are brought to light at different times throughout the story, which casts them in contrasting lights as the plot progresses.



After seeing an example of these feelings beside my own, I knew I needed to expand from the unit of twin relationships. How do outside forces influence the relationship of twins? While I could create the emotion and motivation for actions from the evidence above, I needed to research next the cloudy territory of Society.

Although my main characters ended up being the only children in their family, an article concerning how others see multiples and their parents shed light upon my unanswered questions. Nadine Brozan states that most siblings feel left out when they see their parents as a pair, and then their multiple siblings as a pair. While this doesn't directly affect my main characters, I tried to spin that idea to form this question: how does one sibling feel when their sibling is loved by a town? When instead of feeling as part of a pair, they feel that the pair consists of their sibling and the town? What happens when they feel isolated, that they aren't as "loved" by Society as their twin? This theme plays a large part of my story in an unsaid way, much like Lydia Lee's feelings of entrapment in Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*.

Another thing I wanted to know about sibling relationships that influenced my story was the environments and social structure that twins and multiples grow up in and how that impacts their development. As expected, relationships outside the family like teacher bonding and participation in group activities and religious affiliation weigh on siblings in various ways. Siblings who grow up in the same home often turn out very differently (Crosnoe, Eler, 1762). This has happened in my own family. Whether siblings actively try to differentiate themselves from each other or not is not discussed in this article, but rather a subtheme for the overlying topic of sibling relationships in a non-shared environment. A twin that is less accepted into a non-shared environment will struggle with Society and their acknowledgement in it. Twins not only are influenced by the relationship they have with their double and their family, but "...their

own relationships with teachers and by their monozygotic twins' relationships with teachers” (Crosnoe, Eler, 1770). This theme of indirect relationships affecting a twin directly shines through my piece, in which one twin receives a scholarship to college, picked by the teachers of the school system. The relationships that the teachers have with June directly affect the way they look at Jimmy, her twin.

At this point in my research, I was digging a hole to Narnia and back. I needed to know how literature portrayed multiples, and not just based on my experience with multiples in literature. I’ve read a plethora of books that feature multiple sibling characters, but what is the common denominator? Not only do twins have to face teachers, family members, friends, etc.—they have to face Society together. Elizabeth Stewart accomplishes this through a compelling article about twins portrayed in literature. Whether twins are monozygotic or dizygotic, drama and literature represent them in similar ways—“they also tend to ‘idealize’ their performances, that is, present an idealized image of themselves in relation to such cultural mediations” (Stewart 725). She warns that awareness of twins being separate beings with different personalities is important. Society should encourage twins to be individuals even though they share many things. However, the representation of multiples in Literature is nothing but illustrating an idealized view of twins. I tried my best to expel that notion out of my reader’s minds as they read my story, painting a new, more accurate picture of how twins are represented in reality.

It is hard to tell when you’ve gone too far into the rabbit hole, unsure of what information is actually useful and what is cluttering your brain. It is hard not to get lost in the subject of research, and actually writing something that doesn’t scream “I-am-an-expert-on-this-subject-fear-my-insight-through-writing”. Sooner or later, you just have to trust yourself that you know enough to write; your readers will be the judge on how much you actually know. In fact, I

probably didn't need to do as much research on twins specifically as I did. After reading my first journal article, the creative juices were already flowing. While the reward of expanding my knowledge base was gratifying, I edged towards the vast canyon that was research, almost falling into its misleading nooks and crannies one too many times.

### **Cultural Aspects of the 1930s**

Once I collected much more info on twins than I could ever use, I needed to dive into the world that my class was creating: Middletown, Indiana. Creating a wiki of characters and places was not enough. I needed visuals, language, and newspaper articles to help me establish a setting that not only felt authentic, but belonged in the Midwest. Since I thought my original plot was going to revolve around the accused boys of the Marion Lynching, I investigated into the occurrences of August 7, 1930 as readily as I could.

The lynching that occurred in Marion is mostly forgotten; however the photograph of the mob surrounding the two bodies hanging from the tree remains. The first information I gained on the case was from an educational website entitled "Day 2: Terrorism on American Soil?". The article details the events of August 7, 1930 in which three young African American boys--Tom Shipp, Abe Smith, and James Cameron--were arrested and then lynched (Cameron escaped). Although it gave a great overview, it did not however, give an account of how the local people addressed the injustice going on in their own county. The article in the *Muncie Evening Press* gave much more of an insight on how the inhabitants of Muncie dealt with the situation. The article goes on to say that the prosecutor was going to ask for the death penalty for all three men, who had "confessed" to the crime. The article then contradicts itself by saying that Hardin, the prosecutor would charge the boys with second degree murder if Deeter died, which he did. The article itself tells two different stories. While other articles in this same issue get ¼ of a page, or

a large header, this local tragedy was confined to a very small section stuck at the bottom of the first page of the paper.

While my story didn't end up revolving around that incident, it does play a part in my story. The crime investigation process of the 1930s in the Midwest especially helped. The paper clearly states that the boys accused each other of the crimes, perhaps there wasn't so much confessing going on, etc. This incident is reflected through the character of Joss Lund, an Indianapolis detective, who was not only called in on the 1930 lynching case, but also into the mysterious demise of Jimmy Schaefer. His connection to the lynching gives him an opinion of the town that reflects on his handling of the current timeline of the story.

My story mainly deals with young people, so the next thing I dove into was the cultural and societal norms of that time period. I found an organization that was immensely popular amongst the young women of the era. The Violet Club was a sorority for high school girls, a social organization that organized events like dances and the like. The most interesting thing about them, though, was their dislike for other people in town. They considered themselves to be elitist amongst the other teenagers, "blackballing" girls who they disliked and ripping on the opposite sex in most of their meetings. Gossip was the majority of the meeting minutes and exhibits a reflection on not only the teens of the time, but their opinion of the goings-on in their town. This was somewhat of a metaphor for my main character, June, although she was not a member of this group. Her disdain for Middletown is reflected through her journal, in which she rips on many of the adults and those in power.

Of course I couldn't research every aspect of a teenager's life—I had to make the decision to imagine the rest of it. I was a teenager once, and teenagers across time and space often face the same obstacles. It didn't matter that I wasn't a twin or around in the 1930s, I had

experience with jealousy, disappointment, and anger as a young person. I'm still learning those lessons. While I had to look up multiple slang words to make dialogue seem authentic, I didn't have to research emotion. That's something that comes naturally to all people, they can have different experiences with different circumstances, but you can pinpoint a time when you felt those exact same emotions as another. I'm hoping my readers can relate to these commonalities without being a multiple.

Besides local agendas, I also looked into popular propaganda of the time, including *Life* magazine. What better way to understand a time period than to look at its popular culture? 1936 was the furthest back I could go in this periodical, but since the Midwest is a bit slower on catching onto trends and such than the rest of the continental United States, I didn't figure the fashion and activities were very far off. This gave me a unique view into the world of the common person during the 30s that it might be the most helpful piece of research I compiled. It gave certain details about the advancement of technology (there is a mixture of painted photographs and actual black-and-white photography, what gadgets were breaking ground, what the President was up to). This was a weekly publication, which kept Americans, even in the Midwest, very up to date on the lives of celebrities and fashion that a local newspaper couldn't achieve. It helped me wrap my mind around the 1930s and make the story as authentic as possible.

### **Muncie in the 30s**

The last thing on my checklist of research was to get a feel for the fictional town. What did Muncie look like in the 1930s? What buildings were considered to be new? What were the most popular architecture styles? The photographs of two buildings in particular drove my idea of what Middletown in the 30s would be like: Ball Memorial, and what is known as the

Vandercook House. The hospital (<http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/sg/id/98/rec/15>) was no doubt impressive for its time, with a circle driveway, plenty of lawn space and the popular Craftsman design by local architect Cuno Kibele.

The Vandercook House was an extremely interesting find as I searched for the home (<http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/MunHisPhoto/id/2110/rec/311>) that my main characters would inhabit. This house would've been extremely popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—it includes three stories, a wraparound porch, many windows—something an established family would desire in their home. The location of this home was perfect in its own right. The twins' father owns a store in Downtown, and it is also conveniently located near a library, where my main character could go to study.

After finding all of this information, I felt as if I was no longer a person from just this century; I could write from a perspective not my own. Did it take multiple drafts? Of course. It was hard to get the researcher out of my head once she began archiving things in my brain. After the first draft crashed into a heaping pile of forced language and details, I reminded myself that I was first a writer, trying to tell a tale of something based on actual places, people, and events. This was not a history report; readers didn't want to be bored with facts. I had to somehow concoct an equation that read more like a story than a journal article, while still visualizing themes and theories about the human condition.

This story is a showcase of competitiveness, jealousy, and long-term hurt gone wrong. While it is an extreme example of what I have researched, it portrays many of the everyday feelings that multiples experience through their childhood and even into adulthood. I had to go outside of my own experience to fulfill the answers to my questions, both in the history of Middletown and the relationship that my main characters struggle with. While my purpose was

not to educate or have an opinion on the subjects I researched (unlike scholars, who strive for just that) I still needed to know enough about these topics to become a reliable narrator. While my end result was much different than a scholar's, the point of attack was much the same.

This story has expanded into more of the beginning of a novel instead of a short story, and the amount of research I have done verifies it. However, it would have not been completed at all without the aid of the research I conducted about Middletown and twin relationships.

Researching this much information for a creative piece has opened my mind to what it means to be a writer. Wherever my career takes me, I know I have been equipped with the tools to research materials for the purpose of finding data and transforming into something artistic, to develop something that isn't just research, but something that can be used to move human hearts. I feel confident that when going into the unknown, I can ask the right questions to find more answers than I thought imaginable. This drive for knowledge will not only drive me as an employee, but also as a lover of learning and a humanities aficionada. It might take me some time to decipher the gold from the gunk, but I am certain I will be able to uncover the truths that are buried within our Society, some of which we aren't aware yet.

But it breaks down even simpler than that. The ability to do research, to have a question and seek the answer, is something that is imperative to our education, now and for the future. We will never stop being curious throughout our lives, and the methods and strategies we have learned in this institution makes finding those answers, feeding our desire for knowledge, possible. Learning how to investigate farther than face value shows that we have a constant desire to expand our minds, to retain new information and share it with others. This desire gives us an immense amount of skill that is not just applicable to term papers, but to further educate ourselves for the rest of our lives.

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# Headlights

Hannah Vollmer

(1932)

June Schaefer was suffocating. The blood covered her arms, weighed down her cotton dress, smudged the pores on her face. It was her blood, but not from her body. It was full of her DNA, full of similar white blood cells, but it was not her blood. It was her twin's blood, who was laying underneath a tree, dead. But she felt as if she was the one who had been bleeding out, blood filling her lungs, the heat pushing down on her chest as the blood trailed over her limbs.

Her feet caught on the underbrush of the forest floor, and she skidded to a halt, further covering her body in filth. She tried to brush leaves off of her face, but they only stuck to her hands. She forced herself not to think about it, only about the road, the road that would surely appear if she ran far enough. From there she could get help. She shoved off of the ground and started to run, listening for sounds of traffic, cars that she could flag down as they passed by. On a night like tonight people would be drawn out of their homes, taking Central Avenue out to the dance hall in the next town over or the county baseball games that often occurred on summer nights.

She fell out of the woods, Central Avenue before her, but couldn't see any traffic headed her way. The darkness that surrounded her was different from any she had experienced; it was as if the heat had suffocated everything around her, the wind not daring to make any noise through

the trees, the katydids and the crickets squished beneath the humidity, her ragged breathing sounding out of place in the country night.

“C’mon June. You gotta find a way out. Gotta find a way out,” she muttered to herself, looking both ways. Which way was town? Her head buzzed, disoriented by the pounding in her temples. A desperate cry escaped her lips, a whine that floated up towards the moon, a call that would remain unanswered as long as she stayed where she was.

“Keep it together, girl,” she told herself as she hurried down the road. Bugs were starting to swarm around her, attracted to the sticky substance that covered her body. She slapped at them, annoyed. There was still no one coming down the road. Where the hell was the traffic? The moon was high, lighting up the road like a giant street light, a silver glow coming off of the gravel, shimmering stars similar to those that dotted the darkness above her. A car wouldn’t be able to miss her with as bright as it was. She slowed her pace, looking back often for a sign of headlights. She covered her face in her hands, stained with her brother’s blood.

She couldn’t tell if it was sweat or tears running down her face as she sat in the middle of the road, tucking her dress beneath her as if she were sitting in front of a crowd. She looked both ways, but there weren’t any headlights to be seen on the horizon, no familiar hum of the Chevy’s and Fords that buzzed around town. It was mute—she would be able to hear a car coming from two miles out, just like Jimmy taught her.

It had been a slow morning in the office, Joss Lund barely touching the most recent case he had been assigned. Some girl had poisoned herself after being abducted; family wanted justice. But Lund had hit a dead end, chain smoking until his lunch hour. As he was walking out the door to head to the corner diner, his phone rang. It was Johnson, practically begging.

“She was found along Central Ave, in the middle of the night, her brother strung up .  
Carey thinks it’s the niggers.” Johnson told him.

“So what’s the problem? Sounds like a closed case.” Lund swiveled in his office chair.

“It’s not. It’s Jimmy Schaefer.”

“Who’s Jimmy Schaefer?” He looked out the window, uninterested.

“The most well-liked kid in town. Even the negroes adore him. This isn’t something that  
can be written off.” Johnson argued.

Lund drove in his Ford, the late afternoon sun glaring in his eyes as he drove towards  
Middletown. He tucked his eyes under the brim of his hat, trying to avoid the sun’s gaze. There  
was a nice breeze coming in through his window, despite the August heat. But that’s where the  
niceties stopped. The trees that lined the road stood guard, making Lund feel like he was already  
being judged. He pulled out a cigarette—his memories of Middletown weren’t good. He had  
been called because of his expertise on the other case, but didn’t have much hope for a better  
outcome.

Sometimes the two young bodies hanging from the courthouse trees frequented his  
dreams, running after him as he tried to move forward. Those boys hadn’t received justice, and  
there wasn’t anything just about this town. He had wanted nothing to do with Middletown after  
the lynching, directing calls from that part of the state towards other detectives. He wasn’t the  
only detective in the state of Indiana who cared about right and wrong, but sometimes it sure felt  
like it. As far as Lund was concerned, the morals of a man far outweighed his color.  
Unfortunately, the majority of people in Indiana didn’t agree with him. The people of  
Middletown were more than heathens, taking matters into their hand when and where they saw  
fit. But he couldn’t ignore a call from a concerned officer, pleading with him to come out and

investigate this murder case. It wasn't exactly an invitation, but he was curious. A kid is found hanging from a tree, his sister found in the road? And no witnesses. Had the Negroes in Middletown strung up the Schaeffer boy to exact revenge? Detective Lund didn't think so, but this Lt. Johnson was adamant about the strangeness of it all.

He was brought out of his thoughts by something running out in front of him. He slammed on his brakes, his wheels squealing on the pavement. He climbed out of his car, standing in the middle of the road looking for whatever darted in front of him. As he searched, he noticed how secluded this patch of the road was. And then he remembered what Johnson had told him.

They hadn't been sure if June was alive or dead in the road.

Lawrence Christenson was coming up fast when he saw the heap in the road, a blob of white against the pavement. He slammed on his brakes and turned hard, sliding to the shoulder. His heart was thrashing against his ribcage. He looked at the road, where the heap was lying. He hadn't hit something right? He jumped out of his car, second guessing himself. The blob did not stir on the road. He crept closer. Again, he second-guessed himself—this thing was covered in blood. Was he certain that he hadn't clipped it?

"My god," he uttered as he realized that it was a girl, a young woman, lying in the road. What the hell was she doing out here? She stirred, a head rising off of the pavement.

"Miss, are you alright?" The girl was weak, barely able to push herself up off of the hot road. Her arms shook as she held herself up, her head swinging from side to side, then limply drooping towards the ground. He towered over her, casting her face into shadow. He pulled her off of the ground, letting go when he realized that the blood was still wet.

“Are you alright?”

“Jimmy,” she whined, her eyes fluttering open to look at him. “Please...Jimmy.”

Lawrence picked her up, realizing who it was, and hurried over to his car. After placing her in the passenger seat, and covering the wounds around her hands he sped off in the direction of Middletown General.

“What happened to you?” he almost yelled as he raced towards the first lights of the city.

“Jimmy,” was her reply.

“What about Jimmy?”

Her hands were shaking, blood running free from the cuts around her wrists. “You...you have to help him.”

“What happened to him?” Lawrence slammed on the brakes as the traffic light turned from green to red. She only shook her head, slowly as if she was confused.

“They...they...” her voice cracked, tears running down her face. “He’s...”

A car honked, making Lund jump in the road. He turned, seeing a delivery truck behind him. He touched the brim of his hat, walking back towards his vehicle. The horn honked again, an agitated rhythm echoing through the trees.

“C’mon, flatfoot, I’m on a tight schedule!” the man behind the wheel yelled.

Lund waved him around, watching the truck speed down the road. He scowled as he climbed back into his car. He hated having to come back for the second time. He started down the road, unsure if the outcome of this case would be any better than two years ago.

Jimmy had thought the idea was stupid. They were too old to go swimming at Hank’s

family's lake. If you could call it that—it was more of a hole in the ground, one lone tree standing guard with a rope as its only weapon. He turned to see Gene and Dick throwing sticks, Charlie looking up at the evening sky through the trees, and Hank with his arm slung around June's shoulders. He frowned, stomping forward.

“June,” he called out, picking up a pebble and throwing it through the tree branches. It ricocheted off them, sending snaps of anger through the trees, just like the anger that was snapping in his chest.

“What?” she called back, giggling at something Hank had said.

“Get up here,” he ordered, without looking back. It fell silent. “June!”

She rushed up towards him, walking alongside him silently, knowing that she was about to be chastised. She started to say something several times, a protest, an explanation maybe, but she stopped herself each time, silenced by her brother's set jaw.

“What did I tell you about staying away from Hank?” he said, a low growl amongst the cicadas and the katydids, the other creatures of the forest scared into submission.

“Jimmy—“ she started, crossing her arms. He looked towards her, his frustration fizzing down from his chest. She was pouting, her lower lip starting to quiver.

“I deserve to be happy too.”

*You deserve better than Hank*, he thought as he looked back towards the group of guys trailing behind them. They were farther back than he thought, talking amongst themselves, Hank frequently looking towards June. Jimmy rolled his eyes, slinging his arm around his sister's shoulders.

“I just don't want you to settle, that's all. I just think—“

“You can think when you’re at MU this fall. Let’s just have fun ok? Before summer’s over and we all have to grow up?” She mumbled, looking out at the shadows that fell through the trees, creeping in on their conversation, stalking them as they neared the secluded water and away from the road.

“Hey Gene! Where’d ya say those Marion skirts were meeting us?” He turned, but the fellas were nowhere to be found. Suddenly, he was pushed forward, something pulled over his head. He swung his arms, trying to fight off whatever was around him. He fell to the ground, his arms wrenched behind his back. He could hear June screaming.

June didn’t look up when Lund entered the room. She was staring out the window, her wrists bandaged, clothed in a white hospital gown, scrubbed clean of the blood that had covered her body when he had first encountered her. But her face was still smudged with dirt and tears, a reminder to every one of the hell that she had encountered. Her father slept next to her in a chair. It was almost as if she was transfixed on something outside, something miles away, something that she couldn’t get rid of.

“Miss Schaefer, I’m Detective Joss Lund. He started, folding his jacket over the back of the other chair in the room. She didn’t respond.

“June?”

The authorities had told him that June was in shock, thrown into silence by the traumatic experience she had gone the night before. But as Lund watched her stare out the window, he noticed how strong her gaze was. Despite her shaken appearance, she looked collected. She was silent, but composed—she didn’t seem upset at all. Accepting of the fate that had befallen her brother sure, but not scared into silence. From what he had pulled from the cops, she had hopes

of going to Middletown University in the fall, to pursue a career in teaching. But the Schaefers only had enough funds to send one child to school, and Jimmy had already been awarded a scholarship for MU. She had spent the summer, working in her father's store, and spending time with her mother, joining the Quilter's Club, and running the Sunday school at the local Lutheran Church. She had slowly been absorbed into the feminine culture for girls who had no hope of continuing their education. There was a rumor that Hank Rodgers, the supposed steady of June, would propose before the end of the year.

No, she didn't look like a prisoner of fear. She looked more like a slave to Society, a girl that had been robbed of her dreams and was silently suffering as she smiled for the crowd.

"Is he dead?"

Lund blinked back into the present, out of his mental notebook, where his thoughts were being echoed in the room. June was staring at him, picking at the bandages around her wrists. Her eyes, though bloodshot, and red from crying, were piercing him in the small room. Lund shook his head.

"I'm not--" He scratched the back of his head with his pencil. "Mind if I ask you some questions?"

She turned her head again, staring at the window. He knew that was all he was going to get out of her—for now anyways. The struggle with this girl was just beginning; and unfortunately she had the upper hand. But Lund couldn't make himself leave. There was something about this girl that was intriguing. Her father stirred in his seat, a growl of a snore escaping before he sat up in his chair. Lund nodded, grabbed his coat and headed back into the hallway.



They found Jimmy's body that morning.

The authorities finally got enough coherent details out of June to start looking in the woods off of Central Avenue. He was hanging from a tree, noose tied tightly around his neck. He had been shot twice—once in the chest, once in the stomach—most likely by shotgun. They weren't sure if he was shot or hung first. A black pillowcase was covering his head, and when they removed it his eyes stared back at them, wide open, to the darkness around him.

"Cut him down," Bill Carey, police chief of the Middletown force, ordered. He puffed on a cigar, frowning as he looked around the scene. The water was shimmering in the early morning light, the search dogs tied to a nearby tree, tongues hanging out, trying to relieve themselves from the tiring search. "Think you can handle that, Johnson?"

Lt. Mark Johnson nodded grimly and started towards the large tree. He motioned for two other officers to help him, pulling out a large pocket knife from his belt. *It was one time*, he thought angrily back to the time he had dropped a body as they were carrying it from the crime scene. He had been new to town, and right out of the academy—but Carey never forgot it. Now, whenever he was given a task, the phrase "Think you can handle it, Johnson?" followed. The other guys on the force dared not to chime in, for fear that Carey would come after them next. So they all obediently started towards the tree, while Carey's precious hounds spread out underneath the shade.

Jimmy's neck was bruised, his head hanging at an unnatural angle, and there was a stench that Mark and the other officers couldn't get out of their noses. Some retched, some swallowed hard, and all used handkerchiefs to cover the smell as they watched the body drop from the branches above them. It hit the ground with a thump, hollow and soft, the crickets pausing in a moment of silence before once again greeting the first rays of sunlight.

“Poor kid,” one of the other officers mumbled. No one moved towards or from the body, silently giving their respects to the dead man in front of them.

“Hurry up, over there!” Carey bellowed, his cigar clenched in his teeth. But still the other blues did not move, afraid to move forward with procedure.

“Who could’ve done this to Jimmy and lived with themselves?” Frank Earnhardt, one of the older guys in the company, asked.

“Didn’t deserve this,” another among them muttered. They all kicked at the ground around the tree.

“I said hurry up!” Carey’s voice carried from the foliage yards away, where he leaned against a trunk, puffing on a new cigar in the shade.

“I’d like to see him get his ass over here and deal with this kid.” Earnhardt grumbled, motioning for Johnson to grab the stretcher tilted against the trunk. They lifted Jimmy’s disfigured body onto the stretcher and started for the coroner’s car.

“Anybody got any ideas on where we start looking?” Deputy Eugene Rican asked as Earnhardt and Johnson passed the big dogs that ran the station, and the town. Sure there was a mayor, but as far as the citizens were concerned, this was Carey’s town. He would take care of them—he was just. They could overlook his drinking problem, his hatred and eagerness to blame every violent act on the blacks; as long as they could sleep at night they didn’t care.

“This looks like something that happened in June, when those damn niggers whipped that kid that was trespassing,” Someone murmured.

“This was definitely a retaliation against the white community,” Carey chime in, talking through his teeth clenching his cigar.

Johnson bristled. “You can’t be sure of that, sir.”

“What makes you think it’s anything else? It’s happened before,” Carey challenged, pushing his chest out, as if he was guarding his territory.

“I don’t think we can rule this retaliation until we get more out of June,” he argued, heading towards the coroner’s car.

“You just better watch your step, boy. Wouldn’t want you to trip and make the evidence unusable.” Carey winked at him, pulling out another cigar from his pocket.

Earnhardt shrugged at Johnson as they headed towards the woods. “That bastard could’ve killed this kid himself and the town would still love him. God help us.”

Jimmy couldn’t believe he had won.

He had applied last minute, not even sure if he wanted to attend Middletown University. He hadn’t told his parents, his friends, especially not June. He wanted to keep his options open, that’s all. Mrs. Miller clapped loudly as she repeated his name over the intercom in the Middletown High gymnasium, waiting for him to come up on the stage. He sat dumbfounded, between Hank and June, not knowing what to do. He didn’t notice June’s confused look, as if she was waiting for Mrs. Miller to correct herself.

“God help us, you’re going to college,” Hank laughed, shoving him out of his seat. “Well go on.”

Jimmy stumbled from his seat in the bleachers towards the stage. The crowd only seemed to roar louder as he climbed up the small steps. The sun shining in from the windows seemed to follow him, creating a natural spotlight that followed his movements as he shook her hand. His heart swelled in his chest, growing prouder by the minute. He waved to the crowd, thanking them, the town, for once again believing in him. He peered around the room, looking for his

parents. Instead he locked eyes with June, who was clapping and smiling at him, tears dotting her eyes.

The police told Lund they didn't find the weapon or anything that could lead them to a suspect. Their only witness was June, and she wasn't speaking to anyone. The following morning she was released from the hospital and taken home. She had also refused to talk to Lund,, watching him from the window as Lucille, her mother, informed him that she wasn't taking any visitors. With nothing else to do, and with his room at the Hotel Roberts not ready yet, he drove out to where he had found June, and stumbled along through the forest.

It was unbearably sticky as he walked, shedding his jacket minutes into the trek. He checked the road, wanting to make sure he didn't wander too far from his car. He was unsure of how far June had wandered that night, but the blues that had he spoken to assured him it wasn't too far into the woods. However, he soon lost sight of his car, the shade from the branches above blocking not only the sunlight, but any sort of breeze that could have helped make the hunting more pleasant. As he stumbled along, he couldn't fathom why the Schaefers were even out here. Where had they been going? Why so late at night?

Lund had travelled farther into the woods than expected, sweating profusely in the August heat. He grabbed a handkerchief and patted his forehead, but could not escape the feeling of entrapment among the leaves. The branches seemed to swing lower and lower, until he finally decided to sit beneath one of the large elms, waving his large brimmed hat in front of his face. From here he could see the oak where Jimmy hung, the tree looming in his eyesight. His heart was struck with a melancholy feeling, one he tried to chain back into the depths of his heart. As he swung his hat back and forth, he noticed a specific smell, one not natural to the forest. It

smelled like burnt metal, as if charcoal was smoldering beneath his feet. He pushed himself away from the tree, coming away with a hand covered in black powder. Lund rubbed his fingers together squinting.

It looked ordinary enough, a large sturdy trunk spouting branches into the heavens, reaching for desires that couldn't be tamed by the earth. Why had he stopped? On closer inspection he found black gunpowder residue, and two names cut into the trunk. There was moss starting to grow around it, the names receding back into nature. He dug out the pocket knife from his trousers, pushing away the growth. JS and HR. Who was HR? Jimmy Schaefer—and who? He wrote this in his notebook, chewing on his pencil as he squinted in the shade. He looked around the roots, but nothing was out of the ordinary there. There had not been a body here.

Whoever had killed Jimmy Schaefer, had moved him to hide this fact. And the authorities hadn't even noticed.

Jimmy broke his hand the first time he caught them together. He was walking Ruth Christenson home and they were cutting it close to her curfew, pausing to pull each other into dark alleys, to spend a few dark moments together in the late July heat. Ruth was a bit too excitable for Jimmy's taste, but he knew that his parents liked her and her parents adored him. He might as well and try to have as much fun with her as he could.

"Jimmy," she whispered into his ear as he kissed her neck. "Oh baby—"

Jimmy tried to ignore her, but she kept whispering into his ear, as if she were Helen Hayes or something. He sighed, pulling away from her.

“Ruth, be a doll and quit beatin’ my gums ok?” He ran a hand through his hair, it sticking up in the early summer heat.

“I’m sorry, baby.” She pulled him to her by his suspenders, pressing their foreheads together. “I don’t want to go home tonight. Let’s get outta here.”

Jimmy laughed. Dames were just too easy to please. They were too giddy, ponies that wanted to run before they were out of the gate. He shook his head, and wrapped his arms around her. “Not tonight. Your folks would kill me.”

“Not if they can’t find us,” she said, pulling him deeper into the alley behind Schaefer’s General Store. The lamplight receded, and no one would be able to see them from the sidewalk. Ruth and Jimmy got lost in each other, his hair becoming even messier, her blouse becoming untucked. They were rebels and explorers of the night, discovering themselves and each other in the summer shadow.

Their moment was interrupted by a girl’s high laugh, echoing down the alleyway. There were footsteps approaching. Jimmy pushed Ruth towards the wall, peering into the dark street. They wouldn’t be caught, but could creep in on whoever was strolling down this way.

“Hank Rodgers, I told you this bank was closed. Now stop or I’ll have to explain to my brother why I have a bruise on my neck!” the girl giggled. “Hank!”

Jimmy smirked; Hank was such a dog. He and Jimmy shared many things, including their ability to charm a girl with just about anything. They could make fishing in his family’s lake sound like the most romantic outing available to a Midwest gal. Who was he out with tonight?

“Who is—” Ruth started. Jimmy covered her mouth with his hand, sending a glare her way. She stared up at him regretfully.

Hank and his gal came into view, shadows against the streetlamps of Jackson St. He pulled her towards him, but she pushed him away. They struggled against each other, but Hank won, picked her up, swinging her out towards the street. She screamed loudly, grabbing onto his neck. He laughed at her dramatics, putting her down underneath the streetlamp. He kissed her, keeping their faces hidden from Jimmy and Ruth, still spying in the alleyway. Jimmy grinned; he couldn't wait to heckle Hank about this the next day after church.

"Hank, you're becoming a sap ya know that?" the girl said. Jimmy knew that voice—the teasing tone she used familiar—but who was it? "I'm gonna have to tell all your friends that you're not the dog you used to be."

"Go ahead. I don't care." He kissed her again, but after a moment, she slapped his chest playfully.

"I'm calling your bluff," the girl teased. "You're not ready for such a reputation!"

"You're so full of it," he replied, the duo starting down the walk again. Jimmy and Ruth crept farther towards the street, hoping not to lose the conversation.

Hank and the dame stopped, the street empty around them. He tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. *What a sap*, Jimmy thought to himself, laughing. Hank was grinning from ear to ear; even from the shadows it was obvious.

"How'd I ever get stuck on you, June?"

Jimmy stiffened. He had heard wrong; his best friend was not out necking with his sister. June didn't date anyone. Never had. Or so he thought. He pushed away from the wall and followed them, dragging Ruth along by the hand.

He watched them as they held hands, a fire exploding inside his chest. Jimmy had made it clear to all his friends that June was off limits—she deserved better than any of those goofs.

Especially Hank. When Hank reached for a cigarette from his shirt pocket Jimmy said, “Need a light?”

“That’d be great, bud.” Hank looked towards him, and froze. June’s expression changed from smiling to somber in a matter of milliseconds. “Jimmy. Ruth.”

Ruth tried to tug Jimmy past them, struggling to move two feet. The tension between the three of them was thick, a humidity that made it hard to breathe, one that made the girls look at each other with high eyebrows.

“Jimmy, I don’t want any trouble. I’m already late, I don’t need—“

“Dry up, Ruth. Take my sister home, with ya.” Jimmy snapped.

“Lay off, Jimmy. Your sister can choose who she wants to spend her Saturday nights with.” Hank challenged back, wrapping his arm around June’s waist.

“Jimmy,” June said. Her voice was shaking, but her eyes were steady, glinting at him like headlights in the night.

“Go home, June.”

“No,” she snapped.

“Go home, June!” her brother barked. Ruth stood awkwardly between the Schaefer twins, unsure of what to do.

“Go on, toots,” Hank told June. “I’ll call you sometime soon, eh?”

He kissed her on the forehead, pulling her close, whispering something Jimmy couldn’t make out. He charged and tackled Hank to the ground. June tried to pull him off as the two scuffled along the sidewalk, but he only pushed her away.



“Boys! Knock it off!” June hollered, tugging on one of their shoulders. She was knocked to the ground, hitting the back of her head on the base of the street lamp. She grimaced in pain, touching the back of her head.

She struggled to stand, glaring at Ruth. Ruth watched horrified as Jimmy and Hank rolled around on the sidewalk. She opened her mouth to speak more than once, only to just cover it with both of her hands.

“Oh, Ruth, quit being such a baby. You could try to help.” June pulled her hair back from her face. A smudge of red dashed her cheek. Ruth looked like she was going to faint.

Jimmy got in a few good punches before Hank turned on him. Hank was stronger and faster, but Jimmy had gotten in enough punches to mess up that pretty face of his. His nose was bleeding and there was a shiner already forming underneath his right eye.

“Boys! Stop it!” June started in again, Ruth on the edge of fleeing home alone.

Hank paused over Jimmy, eager for revenge. He pulled his fist back, but June screamed in protest. He looked at her, as if waking up from a dream.

“Go ahead, hit me.” Jimmy challenged. He pushed Hank hard, hoping that he wouldn’t listen to June. That he would pummel him, the two having to explain why they were so bloodied up for the sermon tomorrow.

But instead Hank pulled him up and pushed him towards Adams Street.

“Beat it, Jimmy.” Hank spat blood into the street. “And don’t give June any grief or I will hit you.”

June started after him, but Jimmy grabbed her arm. He let go, swinging his bloodied hand in pain. “You’re not allowed to see him again, ya hear me? Stay away from him.”

Jimmy looked around for Ruth, but she had run off. He sighed, and started off in the direction of the Christensons. June watched him go, alone under the streetlamp, frustration welling up in her chest. Once again, Jimmy hadn't gotten away with something, coming out as the top dog. And she had conceded, if only to stop him from hurting Hank more. Angry tears dotted her eyes and she hastily swiped at them, hoping Jimmy wouldn't turn around. She crossed her arms and waited until he disappeared, before crossing the street towards home.

Lucille Schaefer looked sadly at the man who was standing before her, outside of her daughter's hospital room. His peppered hair was unruly, most likely from him running a hand through it as the authorities quizzed him. His collar was unbuttoned, his jacket slung over one of the chairs in the hallway.

"Are you the one that is here to help my daughter?"

"Yes ma'am. I'm Detective Joss Lund. I'm—"

"You're the one they brought in about that lynchin' case a few years back." A man approached the duo, wiping a handkerchief across his face in the August heat. He put the cloth back into his shirt pocket, wrapping his arm around Lucille. His face was set into a tight line, straighter than the linoleum tiles on the hospital floor "Bunch of nonsense if you ask me."

"I'm sorry to hear about your son, Mr. Schaefer." He held out a hand to the man who had suddenly turned more solemn than what he had been on approach.

"Call me Oliver." He paused a moment before taking Lund's hand. Lund thought about what the officers had told him about the Schaefer family. Oliver owned the biggest general store in Delaware County, was a member of the Sportmans Club, and was one of the only stores in town that closed on Sundays, no exceptions. His wife Lucille was a part of the Lutheran Quilter's

club and was one of the best midwives in Northern Indiana. Their children were both well-liked and the most well-behaved kids in Middletown.

Oliver cleared his throat loudly, knocking Joss back into the hallway.

“You here to find the bastards who did this?” His voice cracked as the words left his mouth. It took him a moment to compose himself, Lucille leaning into him weakly, wringing the white gloves in her hands, the ones that she had dropped three times before she finally walked over to Joss as he went over the notes he had written from his own observations. The authorities weren’t including him in their initial investigation, even though he had more experience than any of the collars here.

He tried not to fix an impression on the two people standing in front of him. But the people who he had met two years ago weren’t very courteous to him, and had wanted nothing to do with him, nor the State. He had left Middletown regretful and scorned, that small towns were worse than the mob at protecting their own. Once a townie, always a townie. And nothing was going to change that.

“Mr. Lund?” Oliver questioned again, looking at Lund. He slowly nodded, hoping that this distraught father wouldn’t attack him, accusing him of only investigating this case to boost his own career. It hadn’t been unheard of, and after the way this town had displayed the mob mentality with the other case, he almost expected it. But the sorrowful man in front of him just nodded, kissed his wife’s head, and headed into his daughter’s room.

“You’ll have to forgive Oliver, Mr. Lund. He just...” she trailed off, distracted by something happening down the hallway. “He’s normally good with words, but this...this hit us hard.”

Someone approached them, a man in a neat black suit, flower next to his handkerchief, extending his hand towards Lucille. “Mrs. Schaefer, I’m Donald Brookley of the Brookley Funeral Home. I’m so sorry to hear about your son.”

Lucille reached out to him, Donald taking her hand and patting it with his other hand. He had a soft smile, with a sincere shine in his eyes, one that only people who dealt with the dead could have. His dark hair was combed over neatly, and he began to murmur to her softly. Lucille looked warily over at Lund. He nodded, and excused himself, returning to his post at the chair where his jacket and hat lay. He flipped open his notes, shortly taken after they arrived at the hospital:

*Female, June Schaefer 18, covered in brother’s blood (Jimmy Schaefer)*

*Found in the middle of nowhere*

*Male, James Schaefer, also 18, dead??*

*Who else was with them?*

*What sort of trouble were they in?*

June flew into the girl’s bathroom of the gymnasium, locking the door shut behind her. She rushed to the sink, cranking the faucet, splashing water on her face to wake her up from this nightmare. She had to wake up; Jimmy hadn’t applied to MU. He didn’t want to go—how many times had he said that college was for soft-handed men? He was looking forward to working in Daddy’s store.

The doorknob rattled.

This was all a joke...a cruel end of the year joke. Jimmy had wanted her to go to school—he knew she had the smarts and how much she wanted to get out of Middletown.

Someone knocked on the door.

She grabbed a paper towel from the dispenser, wiping her dripping her face, a mixture of tap water and tears. She scrubbed her skin, cleaning the smudged makeup off of her face.

But now she was going to be stuck here. Her parents were never going to send both of them to school. They didn't have the money. Her heart pounded, rattling her ribcage. The lights were too bright, her vision blurring, as if she was going to faint. She couldn't catch her breath, as if her brother's future self was suffocating her with his hands. She was going to be stuck here forever. She would never get out.

Hank Rodgers paced below June's window, waiting for her to respond. He threw another pebble, the tick of the glass amplifying against the silence around him. A shadow crossed in front of the window, and then disappeared.

"C'mon June," He whispered under his breath, looking both ways before creeping towards the front porch. He paused near the front steps, listening for the click of the door.

"June, c'mon toots. Quit playing around. I know you're--"

The door cracked, June slipping out, letting the door ease shut behind her. She crossed her arms, leaning against the paneling of the house. Hank moved towards her, but she slid away.

"What do you want Hank?" She whispered, her eyes appearing bright in the shadows of the porch.

"How are you? The town's gone nuts." He ran a hand through his hair.

“You didn’t expect that to happen?” June’s voice was harsh, her arms wrapped tightly around her. “You do remember who died right?”

Hank shook his head. “How’re your folks? They holding up ok?”

He saw her shrug in the moonlight. “I guess. Honestly we aren’t all together much. Now that Jimmy’s gone...they aren’t the same.”

“And you?” Hank nervously clapped his hands together, staring out at the street.

June smirked. “I haven’t been the same for quite some time. But we both know that.” She didn’t ask how he was. She knew—he had regretted the decision they made. He was second-guessing his loyalty to her. He was scared.

“Look, Hank, if you can’t take this, maybe—“

“I can handle it,” he protested, pointing a finger at her. “Who says I can’t handle it?”

“You’re a wreck,” she replied, swaying out to lean on the porch swing. “You’ve practically got guilty all over your face.”

“My best friend’s dead. How am I supposed to react, June?” He grabbed her by the elbow, making her stare into his eyes. They were bloodshot, red, as if he had been crying. Hard.

“How can you say--?”

“Look, fella. Whether or not we want to admit, Jimmy’s dead. Nothing’s gonna change that.” She held his hands in hers, running her painted nails over his veiny hands. “So we’ve got two options.”

“What’s that?” Hank’s shoulders unhunched, finally relaxing in her grasp.

“We can grieve and move forward or we can let this define our lives.” She brushed some fallen hair out of his eyes, smiling up at him. “So what’s it gonna be, Hank?”

Hank paused, holding his breath. He leaned in, kissed her lightly, and then snuck down the stairs and into the night.

Lund tried not to look impatient as he listened to the locals rattle on about Jimmy. All that he could get out of these people was that the kid was well-liked. No one could say a cross word against Jimmy Schaefer, much less name anyone who would have been sore with him.

Lawrence Christenson, a local business owner, came to Lund the day of Jimmy's funeral. The man told tale after tale about the boy's good Samaritan ways, of how "well-liked" he was. Lund, however, didn't like Christenson; he was loud, smoked like a dwindling fire, a small trail of smoke wisping from his bottom lip as he puffed, and smacked the table when he wanted to make a point. "Jimmy Schaefer was one of the only kids I'd trust my life with. He was an honest, genuine human being. You didn't have to worry about him trying to weasel you out of a deal or nuthin' of the kind. My daughter went out with him a couple of times. I didn't even sit outside with my shotgun. He was just a nice kid."

What was it about this kid that made everyone fall in love with him? Surely he had a skeleton in the closet, had made a mistake, pissed someone off. If he hadn't, what was the motive to kill him?

June couldn't go into his room. She stood outside, hand held ready to knock, as if Jimmy was on the other side ready to tell her to quit bothering him. She was alone, her parents asleep downstairs. After saying goodbye to Hank, she had snuck back up the stairs, hoping to go straight back to bed. But she stopped, and stared at the closed door, wondering if the last few days had been imagined. The windows cast bright light into the hallway, the moon dancing

across the hall, but June was wrapped in shadows, a cloud enclosing her body into a stuffy cocoon, one that would never let her turn into a butterfly. She would be stuck in this cloudy prison forever, never able to get the thought of her brother's body on the ground out of her mind. It was stamped with authenticity much like the Louisville slugger bat that was propped against his bedroom door.

She lightly pushed open the door, watching as her brother's memories leapt into the light. His sports trophies, his awards from school, his newly bought baseball cards still sitting on his bed. His desk was covered in letters, preparations to go off to the university in the fall. His bed was made, most likely by their mother. He had had the best view in the house three large windows looking out towards downtown. She slowly crossed the threshold hoping to look around last time and then shutting it forever. However, once she entered, she was consumed by him. Everything about this room reminded her of him, the other half of her soul that had been hacked out of her life. She ventured in more and more, until she was climbing onto his bed, curling into a fetal position. She was trying to imagine him sleeping here, sharing a space with him, much like the womb. June pulled her knees up to her chest and sobbed quietly, letting the moonlight wash over her silent misery.

Hank was much too comfortable in the police station. He leaned back in his chair, his dark hair falling into his eyes, acting as if he wasn't being interrogated about the murder of one of his friends.

"Jimmy was the most well-liked kid in our class. He was friends with everybody, guys and gals alike. He might've not been the brightest or the fastest, but man was he a swell guy."

Hank hooked his thumbs underneath his suspenders as he talked to Lund. "He was one of my



best friends—I just can’t believe anyone would have any reason to do this to him.”. “You done with me, Mister? I gotta get home.”

“I’m not here to ask you about Jimmy, son.”

Hank looked quizzically at him, his feet plopping down to the ground.

“You were at the hospital the night of Jimmy Schaefer’s murder. Trying to comfort his sister, June.”

“Sure. Jimmy, June, and I were super close. Once I heard the news, I had to see if she was alright.”

Hank had bust through the hospital doors only minutes after Lawrence had carried June inside. He looked around frantically, hair wild as if he had just gotten out of bed, shirt half buttoned. He rushed over to June who was being led away by two nurses. She froze as he approached.

“June! Baby, are you alright?” he asked, reaching out to her, but she shriveled away from his outstretched hand. The nurses tried to lead her away, but Hank grabbed her.

“June!”

At the sound of his voice, her eyes became alert. She jumped at him, clawing at his shirt, his face, beating him with bloodied fists. Her cries echoed through the hospital, heads poking of other rooms to see what the commotion was about.

“June! What’s wrong? What happened?” He tried to smooth her hair, but she thrashed against his touch, trying all the more to hurt him. The nurses dragged her off of him, pulling her down the hall. Her voice was strangling itself, her mouth trying to form words while her cries overpowered them. It was a mixture of different pitches and sounds, a garbled unrecognizable mess. Lund watched quietly from his seat, as Hank’s face turned from concern, to confusion, to

one of grief. He slowly sank down to his knees, covering his face in his hands. A nurse approached him and motioned for him to also go down the hall, to be cleaned up. He pulled himself off the floor slowly and trudged towards a set of double doors.

“How did you know she was there? They only telephoned her parents after she arrived.”

Hank thought carefully for a moment. “I saw them heading off in that direction, that night. I shot the bull with Jimmy, winked at June and went on my merry way. I had a date that night ya see.”

“So you wouldn’t call your relationship with June Schaefer anything but a friendship?”

Hank’s eyes darkened for a moment. “I wasn’t allowed to be interested in her, no sir. Jimmy made sure of that.”

“Did you respect his wishes?” Lund peered at Hank’s face. He appeared calm and collected, picking the lint off his shirt as if they were talking about the crop. He pulled out a cigarette from his shirt pocket and lit it, puffing out a long stream of smoke.

“‘Course I did. He was my best friend.”

Lund slammed June’s journal on the table. Hank didn’t recognize what it was, or pretended that he didn’t. He stared at the boy for a long moment, trying to call his bluff. “You sure that’s your final answer? ‘Cuz I’ve got forty-some pages that says otherwise.”

“Oh, god. Jimmy.” June touched her brother’s heaving chest, as he struggled to catch his breath. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t get the blood to come off of her hands. She looked up, and realized that she was alone. The others had run off, and she was abandoned, watching her brother expire in her arms.

“Cowards!” she yelled into the forest, the night creeping in around her. Her heart was tight in her chest, an unfamiliar feeling tugging it in two different directions. She touched her cheeks, not realizing that she was crying. She couldn’t catch her breath, a hiccup forming in between her mouth and her lungs, forcing the air out and not letting any to come in. She wasn’t sure how long she had sat there, before looking up and seeing the outline. The faint outline of her and Hank’s initials.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me,” she said aloud, as she sat back on her heels. She could no longer hear Jimmy’s gasping, only see the faint outline of his chest rising and falling. Her heart was slowly being severed from her chest, skipping and beating fast all at the same time, as if her and Jimmy’s heart were competing for attention in her chest. Hers was trying to beat for both of them, He was fading fast.

She collapsed on to his body, her dress becoming stained by his former life. She started to sob, regretful about the decisions she had made.

“I take it all back,” she whined, sobbing into his shirt. “Come back, Jimmy.”

She apologized over and over, the moon rising high in the night sky. Long after his body stopped rising and falling, she stayed, holding onto him. What had she done?

“June!” Someone shook her. “June! What are you doing?”

She looked up to see Hank, standing over her. He looked ghastly in the fog that was seeping from the ground. His face was caught in shadow, a voice from above, a tone that was bringing her back to reality.

“We have to move him,” She pushed herself off of the body. She brushed herself off, staggering to her feet.

“What do you mean? What are you still doing here?” Hank questioned, pulling her away from her brother. She stumbled along after him for a moment, before breaking free of his grasp.

Her voice became stronger. “We have to move him.”

Lucille Schaefer had stood nervously in the Hotel Roberts lobby. She clutched something beneath her rain jacket, praying silently that she was doing the right thing. June had left the porch earlier that morning to visit the store, leaving her journal behind. The wind was subtle, but strong enough to flip through the pages. She jumped when Lund touched her arm.

“Mrs. Schaefer, what a nice surprise. What can I do for you?” He motioned to the lobby chairs, extremely private for such a public, expansive lobby. He pulled out a chair for her and then took one opposite. He took his notepad out of his jacket, flipping to a new page. “So, what’s this all about?”

Lucille suddenly stood, regretting her decision to give this information to a man that she didn’t know anything about, one that could possibly take away their daughter too. “I’m not sure my husband—“

“If the police are going to find the person that did this, you’ll eventually have to talk to someone. Now you said you had something that might help with my investigation. You wouldn’t want to withhold evidence from someone who’s only trying to help you right?” He pulled a pencil out from his jacket pocket.

“What was June like when you talked to her?” Lucille sat back down carefully, as if any moment she might run back into the rainstorm and to the comfort of her empty home. She folded her hands delicately, hiding the journal from view.

“I’m not quite sure I understand your question.”

“How did my daughter act when she told you her brother was dead?” Lucille’s eyes were watery, but they still cut into Lund all the same. They reminded him of the look June had given him in the car. Her outside appearance had been almost horrific, hands shaking, a terrified aura about her. But her eyes were clear, her gaze somber and steady.

“I’m not sure, Mrs. Schaefer. Why?”

She grabbed his arm, her painted nails cutting into his wrist, just beneath the cuff.

“Was she sad?” There was a sense of urgency in Lucille’s voice. “Or did she seem indifferent?”

“Why are you asking me this?”

Lucille held something out towards him. It was a small journal, twine bound around it. June’s name was cut into the top, the letters the same as the ones in the tree where Jimmy was found.

Lund waited until Hank had left, his large work boots clunking all the way out of the double doors, to venture out into the hallway. The blues stood around for a moment longer, shooting the bull with each other, sipping their coffee, putting out cigarettes, watching the ceiling lights flicker before heading back to whatever they were doing.

“Scuse me, but do you mind if I use your phone?” He asked one of the secretaries. She put the phone up on the raised part of the countertop and sauntered down the hall, calling out to one of the men in blue. “Yes operator? Give me the number for the Schaefer’s.”

*May 28, 1932*

*Once again, Jimmy has successfully ruined any chances of me being happy. He never, ever wanted to go to college, much less leave Middletown. He was going to run Granddaddy's store, like every other man in this family has. He was **supposed** to. But now, he's getting out of here. Of course he is. I didn't even know he had applied to MU, much less got accepted! And he had the nerve to apply for the scholarship, after helping me with my application? That double-crosser. And of course, if one has to pick between the Schaefer twins I'm going to lose. Every. Single. Time. It's not fair. He knew how bad I wanted that scholarship, how many nights I had stayed up working late. Why can't I just be happy for once? Why hasn't anyone ever picked me over him? I wish I could kill him. Things would be so much simpler if he were dead.*

June sat quietly in front of Joss, intimidated by him, like most, quietly inspecting him while avoiding his line of questioning. The sun was setting, her parents closing the store. But she had let Lund in, as he approached the porch swing she was reading on. He held out her journal to her, her eyes flicking up to his suspiciously. She refused to take it from him, silently letting him into the Schaefer home, letting him take a look around. Even in Jimmy's room. Then they settled into the parlor, the large bay windows open to let the air circulate throughout the house.

No matter his approach, she would just shake her head and pick at the bandages around her wrists. From the journal, which was now sitting in front of them, he knew how different June and Jimmy really were, how they had grown apart, how she had secretly started to see Hank to get back at Jimmy for all the times he had taken something from her, a little form of happiness, a ticket that would get her one step closer to getting out of Middletown.

"I want you to tell me what happened that night, June. What you and Hank did to your brother." Lund leaned back into the chaise, watching her eyes burn brighter.

“It wasn’t his idea. Leave him out of it.”

“Then whose idea was it?” Lund paused, the granite pausing above the paper in his notepad.

“It was a mistake.” She crossed her legs at the ankles, her hands still in her life. “It was all just a stupid mistake.”

“At this point it doesn’t matter what it was, your brother’s dead.” Lund wiped his forehead, “I need the names, June.”

“It’s my fault,” She whispered, looking out the windows of the parlor, facing out at the evening sun.

“I know you didn’t always adore your brother, but I don’t believe you’re the one that killed him.” Lund stared at the girl sitting in front of him. She wasn’t as stoic as she had once appeared, shrinking into the chair across from him. Trying to get away from the journal, the evidence of her fury against her twin.

Jimmy could hear June’s screams, thrashing his head wildly around to try and knock off the cloth covering his head. The pillowcase would not move and the sun had already sunk beneath the treeline, casting shadows in front of him. Figures moved quickly in and out of his vision, making his eyes swim behind the dark sheet. Suddenly he heard a gun click, loudly next to his ear.

“Leave her alone!” he called out, his voice reverberating in his throat. “What do you want?”

The gun fired in response, making him scream in horror, his body flying to the ground. Two large hands dragged him up, and then let go, another click of the gun making him flinch.

His shoulders shook in the heat, a frost moving from the top of his head down to his knees. June was hysterical, shrieking “Let him go! Please! Don’t hurt him!” but he could only hear cruel laughter in the silence.

The gun fired three times in quick succession, making contact with the tree beside him. He cowered over, silently crying into the ground. He was roughly pulled up again, the butt of the gun shoved into his back. He cried out in pain, as he was struck again and again.

“Hank! Help! Somebody help!” He got no response, only the cruel laughter of his captors.

“Not so perfect now are ya, Schaefer?” a low growl breathed into his ear.

“What do you want?” Jimmy started to move forward, the gun clicking beside him.

“What do you want from me?”

“We just want you to feel small for once in your life. Like you don’t exist.” Another voice, this one raspy and light, said from behind him.

And then he heard two shots, and an immense heat rippling through his body. He fell to the ground, blinking rapidly and finding it hard to bleed. It grew silent for a moment, the forest quieted by the echo of Jimmy’s struggle to breathe. The pain in his chest grew as something warm climbed from his ribs to his stomach. And then June started screaming, a shriek so loud that all of Middletown must’ve heard her.

“Oh shit.” One of the voices said. “Oh shit!”

There was a rustle of leaves around, someone falling beside him, pulling him up into their lap. There was a pressure on his chest, the pillowcase allowing for an outline of a person trying to stop the warmth from spreading. She was crying, screaming at someone, but Jimmy couldn’t



understand who. He was sinking into the ground, sinking into the forest floor, the warmth slowly turning to a chill. He gasped for breath,

“Oh god, god what did we do? Jimmy!” June cried.

The pillowcase was pulled off, but he could not find her face. Instead there were two bright lights heading towards him in the darkness, as if they were headlights from a car coming to rescue them.